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AUTHOR Madden, Margaret E.
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ABSTRACT

Previous research on marriage indicates that perceptions of control are important to marital satisfaction. To investigate the relationship between attributions of personal control and other variables in marriage, e.g., measures of satisfaction, decision making, and task performance, and attributions of control over decisions and tasks, and to analyze the association between perceived control and power in marriage, married couples (N=37) completed a marital satisfaction scale and a measure of gender role attitude. Results showed gender differences in variables related to marital satisfaction. For both sexes perceived control over activities was the only variable correlated with marital satisfaction, and it was more highly correlated for women. Regression analyses showed that for women, perceived control over decisions and frequency of activity performance predicted activity control; for men, perceptions of spouse's control and personal decision control were related to activity control. Women were more concerned about whether they could choose to do tasks and they do them more, but they didn't feel they got power from task performance. Findings suggest that control over activities is important to marital satisfaction and plays a more important role for women than for men, and that a major issue in marriage today is the division of labor. (PAS)

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WOMEN'S AND MEN'S MARRIAGES:
MARITAL SATISFACTION, PERCEIVED CONTROL, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN

Margaret E. Madden
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Baltimore, MD, April 13-15, 1982.

Women's and Men's Marriages: Marital Satisfaction, Perceived Control, and Attitudes Toward Women*

Margaret E. Madden**

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Previous work on marriage indicated that perceptions of control are important to marital satisfaction (Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981), so this study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between attributions of personal control and other variables in marriage. By attributions of control, I mean a sense of being able to control things that happen to one, that is, outcomes, rather than control over others in the sense of interpersonal influence. The issue of personal control in marriage is a complex one, since in relationships one may sometimes, although not always, have to either have one's spouse's cooperation or have influence over the spouse. Thus control is related to, but not identical with, having power. In order to control one's own outcomes, one may sometimes require an ability to influence the other; but people may sometimes feel they can control their own outcomes without having power over their spouses. For instance, if I know my husband agrees with me on an issue, I will feel that I can control outcomes without needing to coerce him.

There is very little literature on personal control in marriage, but there is a great deal of research on power in marriage, which often follows a paradigm used by Blood and Wolfe (1960). In a large survey of couples, they measured marital power by having participants rate who made decisions in eight areas of marriage, and they defined the powerholder as the spouse who usually made the majority of these decisions. They found that people reported being most satisfied with equalitarian marriages in which neither spouse dominated decision making. Twenty years of subsequent research, however, has produced a lot of criticisms

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of this way of viewing power, and one is especially relevant to the present study. The problem concerns defining power solely in terms of decision making; several writers have suggested that power also involves who carries out decisions, that is, who performs activities. Since wives have done and still do much more in the way of household tasks than husbands (Pleck, 1977), researchers have suggested that women may have more power than decision making measures imply by virtue or their control over family activities (Hoffman, 1960; Safilios-Rothschild, 1976), but there is not much systematic research to support this claim. Therefore, I decided to include questions about both decision making and task performance in the present study.

A second consideration involves the association between perceived control and power: I believe that attributions of control may be mediators between power in a relationship and satisfaction with the relationship because attributions and satisfaction ratings are both internal cognitions about events in the relationship, rather than self-reports of behaviors, which is what reports about who makes decisions or performs activities are. Because attributions and satisfaction are both personal cognitions they should be more highly related than is satisfaction and frequency of decision making or task performance (cf. Kelley et al., in press). Thus, I included measures of satisfaction, decision making, and task performance, and attributions of control over decisions and tasks, in the present study, along with other variables which I will not discuss in this report.

The respondents were both members of 37 couples between ages 30 and 40. I went to the street list of a town outside of the university area to get a sample that included a range of occupational and income levels. I cannot argue that this is a representative sample because couples who agree to participate in a study like this probably differ from those who don't, but I did obtain a mixture of people: 40 percent of the husbands were factory workers, 40 percent owned small businesses or were salesmen, and 20 percent were professionals; the majority of wives worked at least part time. Both husband and wife filled out the questionnaires while I was at their home, and then I spoke with the couple jointly afterwards. The data I am reporting in this paper come from the written responses.

Participants completed a marital satisfaction scale (Locke, 1951; Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981) and a measure of gender role attitude

(Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Then they rated who makes each of a list of 29 decisions, how much control they felt they have over the same 29 decisions, and how much control they felt that their spouse has over each of the decisions. Then they indicated who performs each of 31 household and childcare activities, how much control they felt they have over whether they do each of those tasks, and how much control they felt their spouse has.

In this paper, I want to focus on gender differences in variables that were related to marital satisfaction. For males and for females, I developed post hoc regression models that describe associations to marital satisfaction. These models are heuristic devices for describing complex intercorrelations among variables, but are not meant to be causal models for predicting marital satisfaction. I do not know the direction of causality among these variables; infact, causality is likely to be circular with these kinds of variables, and difficult to detect with any experimental design that can be used ethically to study close relationships.

The models for women and for men are shown in Figures 1 and 2. There is a lot of discussion in the marriage literature about how women and men perceive marriage differently, and some writers such as Bernard (1972) argue that men and women desire different things from marriage and, indeed, experience different marriages. These models also imply that men and women perceive marriage differently.

For both sexes, perceived control over activities was the only variable correlated with marital satisfaction, but it was more highly correlated among women than among men (for women, $r=.51$, $p<.001$; for men, $r=.33$, $p<.05$; $t(33)=5.52$, $p<.001$). In the regression analyses, though , for women, perceived control over decisions and frequency of activity performance predicted activity control, whereas for men, one's perception of one's spouse's control and one's own decision control were related to activity control (also see Tables 1 and 2). Frequency of decision making entered into the equation for men, but not for women; activity performance entered in for women, but not for men. Since both in this sample and in large-scale survey studies, women perform more tasks than men (e.g., Pleck, 1977), this seems to be an important finding. Women care more about whether they can choose to do tasks and they do them more, but they don't feel they derive power from task performance. I believe women don't derive power from task performance because of the

negative correlation between activity control and activity performance ($r = -.49$, $p < .01$); if perceived control is necessary for power, then women who do more tasks cannot have greater power since their perceived control is lower, compared to women who do fewer tasks. One can speculate on miscommunication based on the fact that women are concerned about feelings of lack of control, when men can't understand what the big deal is, so this also has implications for counseling troubled couples.

I also want to mention something about gender role attitude. Although it didn't enter into the models for males or females, it would seem that sex role attitude whould be an important variable related to the division of labor in marriage today, so I looked at interactions between gender, sex role attitude, and other variables. Only one interaction appeared in these data: men and women who perform fewer activities were more conservative and women who perform fewer activities were more liberal regarding gender roles than others ($F(1,72)=5.60$, $p < .05$). Thus, role attitude played a part in frequency of task performance, rather than in perceptions of control.

In general, then, control over activities is important to marital satisfaction, but it plays a more important role for women than for men. Although decision making may have been a very important issue two decades ago, these data suggest that it is no longer as important, although men are somewhat concerned about it. Rather, a major issue in marriage today appears to be the division of labor, and it is weighed more heavily by women than by men in their evaluation of their marriages.

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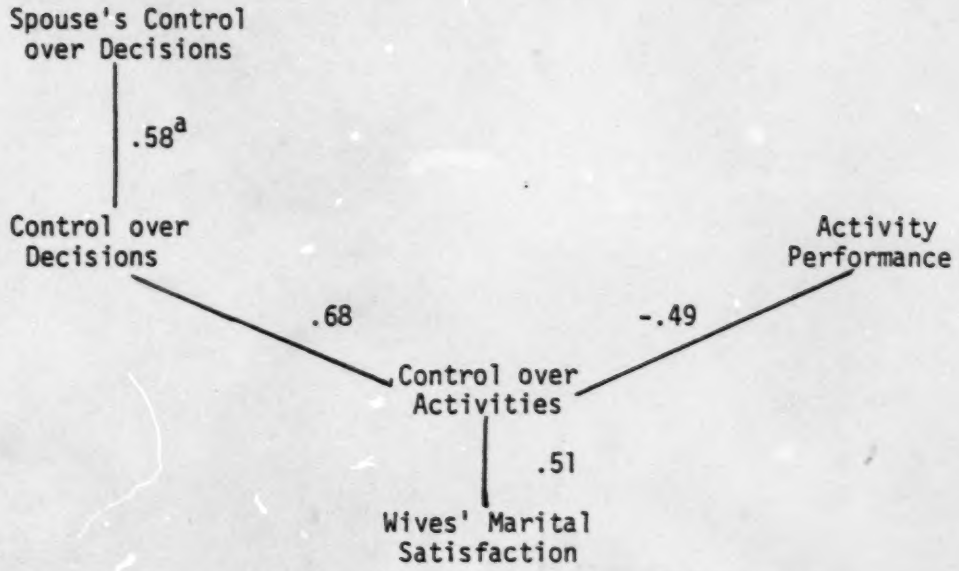

Figure 1. Wives' Regression Model of Variables Associated with Marital Satisfaction

[a]Simple correlation coefficients are shown for each pair of variables.

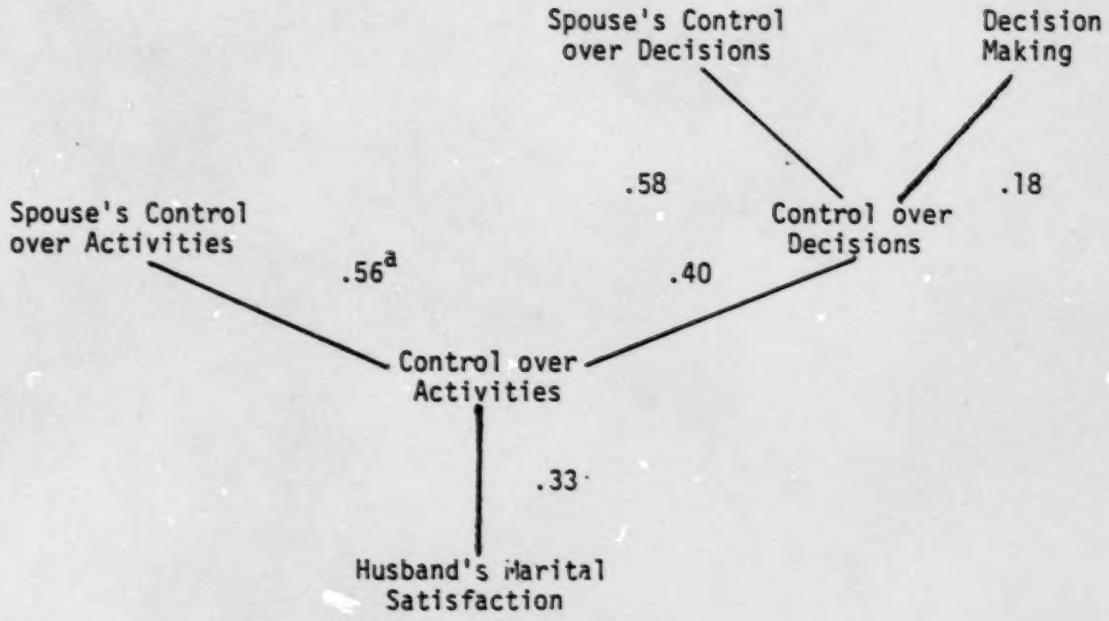

Figure 2. Husbands' Regression Model of Variables Associated with Marital Satisfaction

[a]Simple correlation coefficients are shown for each pair of variables.

Table 1

Steps in Regression Model of Associations between Satisfaction and Other Variables for Female Respondents; a Regression Equation Was Formulated for Each of the Dependent Variables Tabled Below (Also See Figure 1).

Dependent Variable	Statistical Predictors	Simple r	B	F to Enter	p
Marital Satisfaction	Activity Control	.51	.19	11.54	.002
Activity Control	Decision Control	.68	.56	27.70	.000
	Activity Performance	-.49	-.75	5.43	.026
Decision Control	Spouse's Decision Control	.58	-.51	16.36	.000

Table 2

Steps in Regression Model of Associations between Satisfaction and Other Variables for Male Respondents; a Regression Equation Was Formulated for Each of the Dependent Variables Tabled Below (Also See Figure 2).

Dependent Variable	Statistical Predictors	Simple r	B	F to Enter	p
Marital Satisfaction	Activity Control	.33	.14	3.97	.055
Activity Control	Spouse's Activity Control	.56	.67	14.77	.001
	Decision Control	.40	.41	7.48	.010
Decision Control	Spouse's Decision Control	.58	.93	16.02	.000
	Decision Making	.18	.87	9.56	.004